



Starry, Starry Night

(a tribute to Vincent van Gogh)

Burst of petals in ebony velvet skies
tease cottony clouds in sheer delight,
waves 'neath lap gently, let out cries.

Winds murmur songs in cold air, as
lanterns in the dark wink, lulling ships
to slumber soundly, with nary a care.

Cruel chill drills the frail ageing bones
wrapped tightly in woollen winter garb,
winds sweep through, in hushed tones.

No seagulls soared; no seagulls would —
dazzling starry, starry night will boldly
splash colours, like a rainbow could.

Celestial canvas purifies tired souls to
embrace the untold romance of the night.

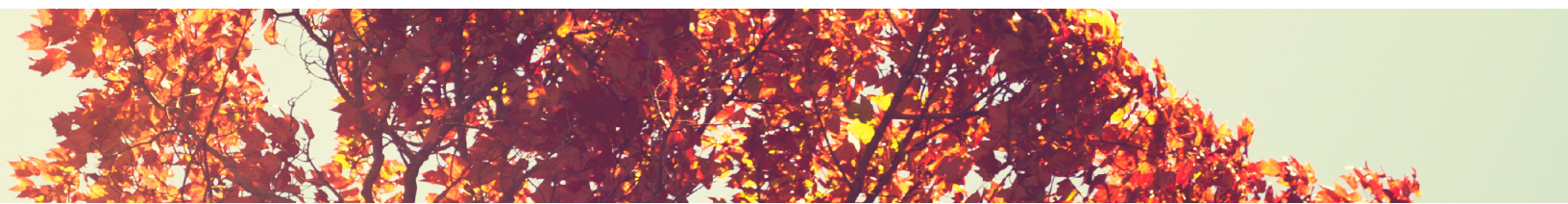
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Autumn in Suzhou

copper rust leaves frolic, flutter and float
lingering lazily, lost in the balmy air —
night is long, a *guzheng* laments mournfully —
strings pulse with the grief of wind and rain,
sadly, scented grasses are limply withering
gasping to await duly their eternal fate as a
shy crescent moon hides behind glazed roofs
and the aged osmanthus tree stands solitary
merciless westerly wind rattles frail blue wisteria
cold dew veils the dying evening light
by an oil lamp, sits a man alone tonight
dreaming of frittered nights and wasted days —
was it here in Suzhou, I asked, that he gulped
countless cups of *shaoxing* to
drown the pain of parting from his beloved —
life flows on, as currents always must
bent willows arch, sway gently in dance
live leisurely, here lives fade to nothingness
on clear mirrored waters, lone boat wobbles,
the boatman's shrill song shatters silence
and wild geese bear autumn far, far south
as the last cicadas savour pearls of dew.



The background of the page features a bokeh effect of out-of-focus lights in warm tones like yellow, orange, and red, with a few cooler blue and green lights, set against a dark background.

Tears for the Dying

in the deep of night
the wards are mute
only words of dying
heard but gasps and
wheezes just to say...
a patient is still alive

the heart monitor bleeps green
and life support whirrs to
tell the brain: pulsate
the heart: pump, and
the blood: flow, warm
like the tropical night

each minute ticks by
snapping threads of life
as fragile as glass
splintering into
shards that slice deep
between life and death

corridors are now empty
no echo of footsteps to
mark vital signs of life
in a corner bed, gasps
of war against death
silence... curtains draw

the end nears and...
tears pour like
torrents,

outside



Poet's Exegesis

"Starry Starry Night" was inspired by Vincent van Gogh's painting *Starry Night over The Rhone*. The painting's depicted images — the deep blue of the sea, the pitch black of the night and the reflection of light in the sea — were what moved me to pen these stanzas. The stars, which seem to me bursts of celestial petals hanging high, were what I found to be the most eye-catching in the painting. In my poem, there exists a sense of intimacy between the speaker and Nature. The style used in my poem relies on a classic *aba* rhyme for most of the stanzas. This is to achieve a feeling of balance, coupled with the rhyme and beat's accompanying tempo, which I hope to evoke in the reader.

"Autumn in Suzhou" was inspired by my visit to Suzhou, China, during autumn. A charming town, Suzhou exudes a certain attraction that has inspired many poets over the centuries, and has likewise affected me. The autumnal mood depicted in the poem conveys a mellow tranquility, and coupled with my use of evocative images of Suzhou's natural landscape, the poem seeks to evoke a sense of intoxication in those who are enamoured of and spellbound by rock gardens, ponds, moongates and drooping willows.

"Tears for the Dying" is a deeply emotional poem, born out of personal grief at the passing of my father, set against the backdrop of an Intensive Care Unit of a hospital. Images in this poem set to highlight the ongoing struggle between life and death, portrayed as "threads" "as fragile as glass". Pathos and melancholy surge through the poem. The poem ends in the succumbing to death, despite the use of medical technology — treatment is tragically futile; Nature wins. The might of Nature strongly influences my writing. Here in this poem, I have abandoned rhyme and have instead chosen to include bursts of unimpeded expression via short, sharp lines to better convey the darkness of the mood, intense feelings and pathos.

Biography

Toh Keng Pin graduated from the National University of Singapore as a biologist. His passion in writing goes back to his student days when he edited The Christian Brothers' School News. He went on to edit several publications in university and throughout his professional life. To date, he has had several travel articles published in The Straits Times. He continues to write poems and haikus, and a few of his works have been published in prefaces in books.

